Conference on Disarmament

English

Final record of the one thousand four hundred and forty-fifth plenary meeting
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Monday, 26 February 2018, at 10 a.m.

President: Ms. Veronika Bard ..... (Sweden)

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The President: I call to order the one thousand four hundred and forty-fifth plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

Distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, we begin this morning the high-level segment of the Conference on Disarmament. This morning we have 3 speakers on our list and 10 more this afternoon, including the address of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. António Guterres, at 3 p.m.

Allow me, at this stage, to suspend the meeting to welcome our first distinguished guest, Her Excellency, Ms. Sigrid Kaag, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: Distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to extend a warm welcome to our first distinguished guest of today, Her Excellency, Ms. Sigrid Kaag, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

It is a special joy for a President, who herself represents a feminist foreign Government, to give the floor to you, Your Excellency, the first, as I understood, woman foreign minister of the Netherlands Government.

Thank you, Excellency, for addressing the Conference on Disarmament. You have the floor, Madam.

Ms. Kaag (Netherlands): Madam President, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, indeed, in terms of Swedish feminist foreign policy, I think we have got gender equality and equity right on this panel. So it is a very auspicious start.

I am delighted to address the Conference on Disarmament today. However, on this upbeat note, let us start actually with a more sober point. Almost 40 years after the establishment of the Conference on Disarmament, the spectre of proliferation still haunts us.

This remark hardly needs any explanation. We only need to look at nuclear proliferation in North Korea, lawlessness in cyberspace, at the breaching of norms and the difficulty of holding perpetrators to account. We live in an age of rising geopolitical instability, growing tensions and increasingly aggressive rhetoric — an age when chemical weapons, despite their global ban, are being used; an age when even the gravest international taboo — the use of nuclear weapons — is under threat.

Rarely has there been a greater need to strengthen the most crucial pillar of our global security: mutual trust. Trust is not a natural phenomenon, certainly not in international politics and certainly not when it comes to issues of security. Trust is created by people, by countries that conclude agreements and ensure compliance. Predictability and verification play a vital role and I believe that multilateral cooperation is the only way forward.

Each country and thus each Conference on Disarmament member State has a great individual responsibility. If we are prepared to shoulder that responsibility, a safer and more secure world will be within our reach. The Conference on Disarmament has traditionally played an important role in this regard. As an active and long-standing member, the Netherlands believes that it is vital that the Conference resumes this role, especially now, and failure is truly not an option.

I say this as Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, a country with a strong, non-proliferation and disarmament set of credentials, but I also speak from personal experience. I led the Joint Mission of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons and the United Nations for the Elimination of the Chemical Weapons Programme of the Syrian Arab Republic. I saw that even in the most dire circumstances a lot can be achieved. Even as the conflict raged, it proved possible to remove and destroy all of the declared chemical weapons of the Syrian Arab Republic — over 13,000 tonnes. That was only possible thanks to the existence of the Chemical Weapons Convention and its verification protocol as well as to its implementing body — the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). Based in The Hague, it is a technical organization under the terms of the Convention, drawn up here in Geneva. I also have to

add that the unity of purpose of the Security Council at that time proved that political support is ultimately required as it is part of accountability.

Of course, the sad case of Syria today shows that this was not enough. It is not the fault of the Convention, it is not the fault of the instrument. Verification instruments only work if all countries shoulder their political responsibility and ensure accountability. Norms only have value if they are enforced; and if violations occur, there will be consequences. Only when this is the case can verification help to build trust.

In this context, let me mention another example: the establishment of the nuclear deal with Iran and its verification by the International Atomic Energy Agency. This is a clear case of countries taking responsibility, of successful verification and instruments doing their work.

Results like these are not achieved overnight. They require perseverance, stamina and steady diplomatic effort. The Netherlands is one of the countries that continues to press for multilateral agreements on disarmament and non-proliferation, in the case of both weapons of mass destruction and conventional weapons. Even in difficult situations when a successful outcome seems a long way off, as I stated before, failure is truly not an option. Take the fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT); the Netherlands sees this treaty as a priority, an essential step towards our disarmament goals. In our view, negotiations should start without delay.

Take the Arms Trade Treaty — a significant achievement in efforts to combat illegal arms trading. As the Chair of the first session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in 2017, the Netherlands encouraged member States to renew their focus on the guiding principles of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT): a secure world with the NPT as the cornerstone of the nuclear regime.

We see this as a small but important, even significant, step. A fresh start with the potential to achieve real results at the 2020 Review Conference. This will require not only responsibility and perseverance, but also continuity. This is why we would like to express our thanks to Poland, the Chair of the second session of the Preparatory Committee in 2018, for its excellent collaboration and coordination. We also look forward to working constructively with the Chairs of the 2019 and 2020 sessions.

Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, let us not lose sight of the positive developments, like the recent decision by the Conference on Disarmament to set up subsidiary bodies. It means that we can finally get back to work, back to the granular detail that matters so much. Let us work together to ensure that genuine steps forward will indeed soon be taken, for instance, in relation to the FMCT I just mentioned.

It is possible; it has been done before. Here in Geneva, at the Conference on Disarmament and its predecessors, crucial disarmament treaties have been concluded like the NPT, the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

But the Conference on Disarmament can only be as successful as the sum of countries that want it to succeed. The Conference, therefore, is no more or no less than the collective will and efforts of its member States. The onus is upon us. If it does not work, we only have ourselves to blame. And we have a choice.

In conclusion, if we jointly forge ahead, the Conference on Disarmament can once again become what it was intended to be: the most important, critical multilateral organ in the field of disarmament. I trust that it will make good on that promise in the years ahead. I trust that we, as member States, will make good on that promise.

I hope that we will seize this opportunity. Trust is good, but as the Russian proverb, which I will not try to emulate, but will say it in English, "trust but verify" was made famous apparently by Ronald Reagan back during the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty negotiations. We need to return to the spirit of trust, but verify. This is a goal towards our collective security. Talks can enable us to achieve that. We will do so with a

realistic spirit, without naivety, but with respect for the position and ultimately achieving that shared goal.

It is upon us. I wish you all every success.

The President: I thank Her Excellency, Ms. Kaag for her statement. Allow me now to suspend the meeting for a short moment in order to escort Her Excellency, Ms. Kaag from the chamber.

The meeting was suspended at 10.15 a.m. and resumed at 10.30 a.m.

The President: The meeting is resumed. Distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to extend a warm welcome to our distinguished guest, Mr. Lassina Zerbo, Executive Secretary of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization.

Thank you, Mr. Zerbo for addressing the Conference on Disarmament. The floor is yours, Sir.

Mr. Zerbo (Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO)): Madam President, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, allow me to thank you, Madam President for your warm welcome and I also wish to express my gratitude to all of you, all the delegations, for inviting me to speak on behalf of CTBTO today.

It is always a pleasure to be in Geneva, and especially to be at the Conference on Disarmament, where the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty was born. Those of us concerned with disarmament and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction have been facing challenging times. Breaking free of the stalemate that has stalled the work of the Conference on Disarmament so long would send a much-needed positive signal to the world. It would demonstrate that countries, despite their differences, are willing to work together to solve the world's most difficult problems.

The decision taken by the Conference on 16 February has sent a very encouraging message to the international community: concrete steps are being taken to advance the substantive work of the Conference on Disarmament. Advancing its substantive work has become of paramount importance since the last NPT Review Conference, and will surely play a determining role in the 2020 Review Conference.

The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, the last treaty that was negotiated by the Conference, was opened for signature more than 20 years ago. In those 20 years, 183 countries have signed the Treaty and 166 have ratified it. A robust verification regime of over US$ 1 billion has been set up and data is being generated on a 24/7 basis, allowing the organization to provide transparently to its member States objective and verifiable information, within minutes of a suspicious event. The Treaty's international monitoring system has been held as one of the greatest accomplishments of the modern world.

I firmly believe that the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty is a "low-hanging fruit" and that the success of any further actions taken to advance work on nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament will depend on the international community's resolve and political will to finish what it starts. This means making dedicated and concerted efforts to get the Treaty into legal force; making sure that the billion-dollar investment is preserved for future generations to come, and providing a platform for progress by establishing a firm basis for the other disarmament treaties needed to close the circle.

Ending explosive testing globally is vital to halting the proliferation of nuclear weapons, both vertically and horizontally. In the Treaty's preamble the States signatories have recognized that the cessation of all nuclear weapons test explosions and, more generally, all nuclear explosions by anyone, constitutes an effective measure of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation in all its aspects. One hundred and eighty-three States have recognized this by signing the Treaty, 166 of which have already made it a law in their respective countries. To date, not only is the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty an effective measure of nuclear disarmament, it is the only effective measure currently within the international community's reach. As I said before, it is a "low-hanging fruit".

You, the member States of the Conference on Disarmament, have a special responsibility in this regard. Your decision on 16 February emphasized the need to identify

areas of commonalities, to deepen technical discussions and to broaden areas of agreement. The Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty provides you with a platform for all of these. The Treaty is almost universal. Its robust verification regime is in place and keeps abreast of technological advances, which strive to prevent or mitigate natural disasters or help science advance in other areas. Every country, with only one exception, has renounced nuclear testing.

Looking ahead to the 2020 NPT Review Conference, it is clear that trust and confidence are the key elements necessary to achieving a successful outcome. We must take great care to preserve the integrity of the institution and instruments we have and to build trust in them and around them. This means maintaining and securing the NPT and its entire chain of responsibilities, of which the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty is an integral part. I look forward to participating in the second session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2020 Review Conference to be held here in Geneva, this April, to recall the close bond between the NPT and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.

Action is needed. Supporters of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty must be ready to take advantage of any opportunities that arise. What was unprecedented can quickly become the new normality. Take the situation in the Korean Peninsula, for example. The spirit of the Olympic games may give a boost to Pyongyang-Seoul relations. This could open up real venues of opportunity for dialogue. And let us remember that we are in a phase where we have a deficit of dialogue and deficit of diplomacy. So the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty could serve, maybe, as a tool for such dialogue. A unilaterally declared test moratorium moving towards the eventual signature of the Treaty would be a good start.

There is also much that can be done through outreach and education, especially to the next generation. The future of disarmament and non-proliferation lies with our future leaders — the young policymakers and scientists of today.

Early in 2016, a CTBTO youth group was established, which now has close to 400 members. It has very active participation from seven of eight remaining annex 2 States. We count on these young people to raise their voices back home and to promote the Treaty, and promote peace and security in general.

At the end of May this year, the CTBTO will hold its second Science Diplomacy Symposium in Vienna. The symposium is open to all applicants with a particular emphasis on participation by those in the earlier stage of their careers. It will examine political, legal and diplomatic aspects of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, as well as the science and technology that underpins its verification regime. I hope to see wide participation from many of the countries represented here today.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, in the end, it is the international community that has the responsibility to make progress on the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, just as it must make progress on the work of the Conference on Disarmament. Although achieving progress is not easy, this is no reason not to try. The smallest steps can give rise to huge leaps. Through trust and respect, multilateralism and dialogue can be asserted as the most effective means of resolving issues in disarmament and non-proliferation.

The President: I would like to thank Mr. Zerbo for his statement. Please allow me now to suspend the meeting for a short moment in order to escort Mr. Zerbo from the chamber.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: The meeting is resumed. At this point, I would like to ask whether any other delegation would like to take the floor, as there is some time now before we have the next guest.

This does not seem to be the case, so I wish now to suspend the meeting until the arrival of our next guest this morning, and that will be Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, President of the General Assembly, who is scheduled to speak at 12:30 p.m.

The meeting was suspended at 10.45 a.m. and resumed at 12.30 p.m.

The President: The meeting is resumed. Distinguished colleagues, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to extend a very warm welcome to His Excellency, Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, President of the General Assembly. Thank you so much, Excellency, for addressing the Conference on Disarmament. I will give you the floor immediately.

Mr. Lajčák (General Assembly): Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen, I am delighted to address the high-level segment of the Conference on Disarmament, and I want to thank you all for welcoming me here. In particular, I thank our Conference President, Ambassador Bard, as well as her predecessor, Ambassador Aryasinha. I also want to acknowledge the tireless work on disarmament by the Under-Secretary-General and High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, Ms. Nakamitsu.

Today I will make three main points, which I hope can frame our discussions. First, I want to talk about why we are here. As you all know, the Conference on Disarmament was established in 1979; and, as you all know, the last decision it reached was in 1996. I wish I could say that is because the need for its work has faded. But that is not the case, because, in many ways, the demand has never been higher.

So I want to emphasize this — we need this Conference. People all over the world need this Conference: because they are being maimed and killed by explosives, not on battlefields but in cities, towns and market places; they are suffering from protracted conflicts fuelled by illicit arms flows; they are wondering if one wrong step could trigger the explosion of an anti-personnel landmine; and because, even in the twenty-first century, they are facing a nuclear threat which seems to be growing even closer. So the need is there and it is urgent.

But the reality is that this Conference is not meeting the need; and that is my second point. As we know, the Conference on Disarmament has been deadlocked since the agreement on the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, more than two decades ago. Between then and now, even consensus on a programme of work has only been reached twice. We have to address this reality because it creates a risk, not only for the people I have mentioned who are counting on this Conference to act, but also because the credibility and the role of this body is in peril. This Conference is the world's foremost multilateral forum on disarmament. It should be producing global frameworks and policies. It should be driving discussions and decisions around the world. It should have the loudest voice of all. Yet if this stalemate continues, it will be sidelined. Action has already been taken in other forums. This was seen, for example, through negotiations related to the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, or more recently, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

There is still time to reverse this trend. We have not given up. During the deliberations of the First Committee of the General Assembly this year, we heard strong calls to revitalize the Conference. And there are still new ideas emerging on how this could happen. For example, I welcome the recent decision to establish five subsidiary bodies to the Conference. This new format will, I hope, allow for a new kind of discussion on agenda items with a view to finding consensus. I hope that we will also hear even more ideas and suggestions from all of you over the course of the next few weeks.

As my third and final point, I want to highlight the bigger picture: we are here to talk, directly and concretely, about disarmament and arms control. But we cannot forget about how the work done here fits into our wider mission, because disarmament has very real links to other areas of the United Nations work, for example, sustainable development. In 2016, global military spending amounted to US$ 1.69 trillion. This means that we are spending more on arming ourselves than on developing our societies, which hinders our progress in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals. Illicit trade in small arms and ammunition can also work to undercut development efforts.

Furthermore, disarmament is an essential part of peace. It cannot be reduced to the process and actions of removing arms or dismantling stockpiles. Rather, disarmament must also be seen and used as a confidence-building measure. It can bring parties to the table and serve to ease tensions and prevent escalations. It can therefore act as a major part of our conflict prevention toolbox.

Finally, given where we are meeting today, we cannot ignore the relationship between disarmament and human rights. This is not always reflected in our discussions; but it is reflected, unfortunately, on the ground. Arms trades and proliferation can also hinder efforts to empower women and promote their human rights.

All of this is to say that the work of this Conference cuts across the three pillars of the United Nations. It therefore has an impact on almost every aspect of the United Nations work around the world.

Excellencies, I want to thank you again for inviting me as the President of the General Assembly to address you. The General Assembly's first ever resolution was on the topic of disarmament. So I do not need to explain how important the work of this Conference is to what we do at the General Assembly in New York. This means that we are following what goes on here very closely. So far, it has not been very promising. Like I said, we need to face this reality because we will get nowhere by pretending that there is nothing wrong.

This is the most important body in the world for cooperation on disarmament and arms control. It has the legitimacy of the international community behind it. As we have seen at the General Assembly, legitimacy does not always lead to speed or efficiency. At the same time, however, legitimacy is the cornerstone of our multilateral system. It is worth standing up for; it is worth defending; and it is worth our discussions, debates and efforts. That is why we should not give up on the Conference on Disarmament. We can overcome the current challenges. We can revive this forum. We can find creative ways to build political will and trust. We can take concrete steps for disarmament and arms control which will benefit people around the world.

Good luck on the discussions ahead and thank you again.

The President: I thank His Excellency, Mr. Lajčák, for his statement and for his trust in this august body and in us, the member States. Allow me now to suspend the meeting for a short moment in order to escort His Excellency, Mr. Lajčák, from the chamber.

The meeting was briefly suspended.

The President: The meeting is resumed. I would, once again, ask whether there is any delegation that would like to take the floor now, when we are coming to an end of this first part of the high-level segment. This does not seem to be the case. So this concludes our business for this morning.

The next meeting of the Conference on Disarmament will take place this afternoon, at 3 p.m. when, as announced, we will hear the address of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. António Guterres. He will be the first speaker followed by Switzerland, Mexico, Myanmar, India, China, the United States of America, France and Brazil.

The meeting is adjourned.

The meeting rose at 12.40 p.m.